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Ex-CIA Official Denies Any Oswald Link to Agency

BY MYRNA OLIVER
Times Staff Writer

Former Central Intelligence Agency Western Hemisphere chief David A. Phillips asserted Saturday that Lee Harvey Oswald "was in no way connected with the CIA" and promised to call for abolition of the CIA if the agency is proved guilty of a "cover-up" in President John F. Kennedy's assassination.

Mark Lane, attorney and chief critic of the Warren Commission, which concluded that Oswald alone killed Kennedy, sharply opposed Phillips during one of three debates at an "Age of Conspiracy" conference sponsored by the University of Southern California's college of continuing education.

The conference will be followed by eight weekly seminars on political and other conspiracies since World War II.

Phillips, who resigned from the CIA in 1975 and founded the 2,000-member Assn. of Former Intelligence Officers, said he testified for 10 hours last fall and remains available to Congress' Select Committee to Investigate the Assassinations of Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr.

He said he welcomed the investigation to put to rest any lingering doubts in the public mind about possible conspiracy behind the President's death.

But Lane countered that Phillips' endorsement of the investigation came late, and said critics of the Warren Commission have been pilloried by the CIA for the last 14 years.

Lane claims Oswald was a CIA employe, and has repeatedly criticized CIA reports submitted to the Warren.

Phillips said he felt like "an insect pierced and mounted on a pin for public display" as the latest "spook" suspected of trying to cover up what happened to Kennedy. He said he resented the masquerade of a Senate employe, whom the magazine New Times later revealed as a CIA employe. The magazine said the Spanish-speaking employe had tried to identify Phillips as the CIA man who introduced him to Oswald but failed to do so.

Lane said he specifically doubted CIA reports that Oswald had contacted the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City, then under Phillips' CIA eye, to ask for messages. He said FBI agents who questioned Oswald after Kennedy was shot in Dallas listened to tapes the CIA claimed proved that Oswald called the Soviets. Lane said the FBI determined the taped voice was not Oswald's.

Lane and University of California at Irvine Prof. John Gerassi won loud applause from the largely one-sided group of 100 who paid $45 each for the day-long conference. They were pitted in debate with CIA supporters Phillips and Ray S. Cline, former CIA deputy director for intelligence.

The finale staged for a larger audience Saturday night was between Daniel Ellsberg, tried for making public the Pentagon Papers critical of the Vietnam war, and former CIA Director William Colby.

After a vitriolic exchange Saturday morning, Cline announced he was "disgusted" with the conference and planned to leave immediately. He said he would refuse to discuss issues of conspiracy again until he received apologies from Ellsberg and Gerassi for what he considered personal slurs.

Lane later told the group that Cline threatened to "take a poke" at him during a private conversation about how much money Lane earned on books about his conspiracy theories.

Gerassi vehemently criticized the CIA and Cline personally for working to overthrow South American governments solely to please wealthy U.S.-based multinational corporations.

Asked by moderator and CBS reporter Bill Stout if he considered the CIA the same under new Director Stansfield Turner (who has begun a national campaign of openness for the agency as under former Director Colby, Gerassi said:

"Yes. They talk different, but they are the same. It is still covert, secret."

Cline, now a professor at Georgetown University, said he left government service in 1973 after 30 years because he felt former President Richard M. Nixon and Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger were misusing the CIA; because power became overconcentrated in the White House, and because the policy of detente prevented necessary gathering of information about "the two truly great conspiratory totalitarian empires of our day—the Soviet Union and the Peoples' Republic of China."

Cline said much of what the CIA labeled as secret in the 1950s and '60s should have been made public. But some secrecy is necessary—such as census data or political affiliations—to protect the public, he insisted.

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